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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the nature and scope of outdoor education is offered in this monograph. Societal changes are cited which indicate a growing need for outdoor education. Historical and current developments in the field are presented. Educational benefits such as improving the quality of educational experiences are discussed, and areas related to outdoor education are covered. The document concludes by explaining ERIC's role in outdoor education. (SW)

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION

AN OVERVIEW

by

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Julian W. Smith

The Nature and Scope of Outdoor Education

Outdoor education is a timely development in American education. Unaccompanied by pressure and controversy, this relatively recent emphasis in curriculum development is gaining recognition and acceptance by educators throughout the Nation. Outdoor education vitalizes learning and is a means of enriching and extending the school curriculum. The use of outdoor settings as laboratories for learning and the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and appreciations necessary for satisfying outdoor interests and pursuits, represents the broad approach to outdoor education. This concept, aptly termed education *in* and *for* the outdoors has implications for many of the content areas and activities that make up the modern school curriculum and offers opportunities for achieving educational objectives difficult to attain within the confines of classrooms.

Outdoor education, in the context of general education, is difficult to define objectively, since the term encompasses a wide variety of learning experiences that cut across many segments of a school program. Thus, the meaning of the term is viewed through many different perspectives by the teacher—generalist or specialist, the administrator, the layman, and by those who see it as a partial solution for current problems in conservation, recreation, and other societal concerns. Outdoor education as conceived here may be characterized as follows:

> Outdoor education is a means of curriculum enrichment through experiences in and for the outdoors. It is not a separate discipline with prescribed objectives like science and mathematics; it is simply a learning climate which offers opportunities for direct laboratory experiences in identifying and resolving real-life problems, for acquiring skills with which to enjoy a lifetime of creative living, for attaining concepts and insights about human and natural resources, and for getting us back in touch with those aspects of living where our roots were once firmly established.*

The Setting and Need for Outdoor Education

The origin of outdoor education involved several aspects of a changing society: (1) the modern concept about the nature of learning; (2) population growth and urbanization; and (3) concern about man and his natural environment. The greater demands on our natural resources caused by industrialization and crowded living have created serious problems that can be solved only by an educated and aroused citizenry. The changes in the nature and extent of work and leisure, tensions, and sedentary living also have a bearing on the great surge of interest in all forms of outdoor interests and

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*Julian W. Smith and others. *Outdoor Education*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 19.

pursuits. Accompanying these societal changes is the recognition of the need for a broader experiential curriculum which adds realism and vitalization to learning. The great open spaces that remain and the rural settings in which a sizable portion of our population live have important implications for outdoor education.

It is somewhat ironic that the rural school, inadequate as it may have been, had inherent educational advantages that modern schools are striving to recover. Among these advantages were the outdoor setting and the almost unlimited natural laboratory that surrounded the classrooms. Small communities and rural areas, in the midst of forests, lakes, streams, mountains and prairies, may well become learning centers for the "educationally disadvantaged" who are being deprived of "on-the-land" experiences enjoyed by their forebears. In any event, outdoor education can add dimension and richness to the education of those who live close to and on the land—yet who need to learn through their outdoor resources and solve problems relating to the quality of the environment.

The Backdrop for Outdoor Education

The heritage of outdoor living, the general belief that simple outdoor adventure, play, and camping are good for children, provides a backdrop for the advent of the many, varied forms of outdoor education in the 1930's. Camping education was a term that gained considerable recognition through the work of L. B. Sharp and Life Camps, Inc., beginning in the 30's. School camping (a sensational form of outdoor education often termed outdoor schools) as an integral part of the curriculum was given impetus in Michigan through the work of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and under the leadership of H. B. Masters in the mid 1940's. This form of outdoor education gained momentum in Michigan in the late 40's and soon spread to other States such as California, New York, Washington, Texas and others. During the span of years from 1930 to the present, there were educational practices such as field experiences and outdoor-related classroom activities that would currently be classed as outdoor education, but which were essentially a part of regular content areas and activities of the school. From camping education and school camping, the broader concept of outdoor education began to grow, along with additional emphases on conservation education, resource-use education, and environmental education.

In 1955, the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (a department of the National Education Association) initiated the Outdoor Education Project, a business-industry-education venture which spearheaded a national effort for a broader approach to outdoor education. In addition to education *in* the outdoors, the Project added the dimension of teaching the skills for outdoor interests and pursuits. Concurrently, there were significant state and national developments in conservation and outdoor recreation. Among the programs that have given added impetus to outdoor education are the report of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, the creation of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, acquisition of park and recreation areas through Federal legislation, and the Federal education programs such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Education Professions Development Act,

and others. All of these forces and events have added to the strength and growth of outdoor education programs.

Current Developments in Outdoor Education

Some of the most significant current developments and patterns in outdoor education in the context of the school are:

1. Outdoor-related classroom projects and units of study using appropriate outdoor materials and resources to enrich and extend the learning opportunities. Much is being done in elementary classrooms and in subject matter areas to relate the outdoor environment and resources to the regular school program.
2. The use of the school site and other outdoor areas as laboratories for further exploration of classroom activities. Field trips and outdoor projects are used to achieve and implement classroom objectives.
3. Resident outdoor schools whereby students and their teachers use camp settings for learning opportunities achieved best in a camp community and outdoor laboratory. This is one of the most sensational and effective forms of outdoor education and offers unlimited opportunities for learnings centering around social living, healthful living, work experiences, outdoor skills and interests, and the application of many of the school's educational objectives and purposes. On school time and as a regular part of the curriculum, the outdoor school serves to motivate and vitalize learning and contributes greatly to the development of good human relationships, better understanding between students and teachers, and opportunities for democratic living. The outdoor school thus has a greater dimension by combining outdoor learning with active participation in problem-solving in a "child's community." The "teachable moments' in such settings are almost unlimited.
4. The teaching of outdoor skills, usually in physical education, recreation, and club programs, and the development of attitudes and appreciations through many activities in the curriculum are important aspects of outdoor education. This phase of outdoor education is paramount in educating a citizenry for obtaining maximum satisfactions from outdoor interests and pursuits.

Concurrent with the growth of outdoor education programs have been significant developments in teacher and leadership preparation—in-service and pre-service. An increasing number of colleges and universities now provide offerings in outdoor education which include graduate courses and workshops and, in some instances, added outdoor education experiences through the various disciplines and methods.

Outdoor Education and the Educative Process

As has been mentioned previously, outdoor education has significant implications for a wide variety of learning opportunities. Outdoor-related experiences can contribute to the achievement of general educational goals and classroom objectives in many of the

subject matter areas and activities in the school program. Among these are the sciences, social studies, language arts, mathematics, health, physical education, and recreation, art, music, homemaking, shop, and others. Some of the greatest values in outdoor learning experiences are those that motivate and vitalize learning: the use of the senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling; increasing the powers of observation and deepening the perceptions of the natural environment; the freedom of movement and thought in an informal environment which is conductive to expressions of creativity; the greater opportunity for communication and verbalization by the learner; the realism of the living and natural environment; greater opportunities for adventure in learning through exploration; and the opportunity to pursue individual interests and acquire skills which have lifelong use and values. Such opportunities for learning contribute to the quality of living and the more constructive use of time, whether through work or recreation. The appreciation and understanding of the natural environment and man's place in it and responsibility for the wise use and care of our natural resources are objectives to which outdoor education can make a significant contribution. Educational experiences in and for the outdoors are basic to solving today's problems relating to environmental quality.

Outdoor Education—A Change Agent

In addition to improving the quality of educational experiences through the use of outdoor resources, outdoor education acts as a change agent for the entire school program. The climate for change established through outdoor experiences gives impetus to change in the diverse areas of the curriculum. The success of educational activities by teachers and students in outdoor education encourages them to try other innovations. The new perceptions gained about teaching and learning through outdoor experiences are more likely to be applied both in and out of the classroom. The use of real life situations in outdoor education in contrast to the usual abstractions in the traditional curriculum carries over into the total educational program of the school.

It has been said that outdoor education is a painless way to effect change in the improvement of the quality of learning. The adventures in the outdoors, freed from bells, walls, and classroom props provides motivation and success in the problem-solving approach to learning. Outdoor education, then, becomes an effective force for change.

Outdoor Education and Related Concerns

There are a number of "kinds" of education and curriculum emphases that have some common concerns and objectives with outdoor education. While in most instances, terms such as camping education, conservation education, environmental education, outdoor recreation, nature education, resource-use education, and others are compatible and tend to add strength to a comprehensive educational program, teachers and administrators particularly, and the general public are often confused, if not bewildered, by the terminology. To many, outdoor education as described here, is a common thread in all of these concepts, but has broader implications for the school curriculum. To be

sure, outdoor education occurs in good camp programs and in this context has been called camping education by some.

Some concepts and attitudes about conservation are often taught more effectively in an outdoor setting in the presence of many of the resources we should conserve and use wisely, and in this sense could be called outdoor education. The proponents of environmental education constantly refer to the use of the natural environment as a learning laboratory in achieving the goals of education that relate to man and his environment. Most of the objectives that environmental education seeks to achieve are inherent in the accepted goals of education.

Another aspect of outdoor education, education *for* the outdoors, is the preparation for outdoor interests and pursuits usually labeled outdoor recreation. The line, if there is one, between the broad concept of recreation and education is very thin.

Nature education, a term less used now, is encompassed in the concept of outdoor education and has special reference to the natural environment and ecology. Resource-use education includes natural resources in potentials for learning that are available in the educative environment.

Toward Greater Action

There is a great need for better communications and more effective cooperation among the espousers of the many "kinds" of outdoor and conservation-related education, some of whom represent agencies not primarily or officially responsible for public education. If all of our people—children, youth, and adults—are to have learning and living opportunities in the outdoors, the combined effort of those charged with the responsibility for education and those who manage our outdoor resources will be needed. The diversity of interests and concerns represented by outdoor education and the multidisciplinary nature of a comprehensive program represents strength when all the resources of leadership and lands, facilities, and materials can be mobilized into concerted action. The achievable goal of such an effort will be a citizenry who will respect and care for our lands and, in turn, will have the opportunity to live and learn under open skies, and in so doing will come to understand aspects of our American heritage.

ERIC's Role in Outdoor Education

There are two ERIC Clearinghouses which have responsibility for outdoor education. The Science Education Clearinghouse at Ohio State University[1] handles documents dealing with outdoor science education and the Clearinghouse of Rural Education and Small Schools is responsible for the remaining areas of outdoor education including recreation education.

Since outdoor education is interdisciplinary in character and has implications for many of the curricular offerings of schools (whether they be large or small, urban or

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[1]ERIC Clearinghouse on Science Education
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rural) ERIC has a unique responsibility for this important development in education. Some of the values that accrue through outdoor education have special significance for urban schools. There are equivalent values for schools in small communities and sparsely populated areas. In many instances, the curriculum offerings are more limited in these schools and the need greater for live and vitalizing experiences. There is an even greater need for the group experiences, socialization, and better understanding between children and teacher, that are possible in a resident outdoor school.

Outdoor education is easily within the reach of small schools and rural areas. The outdoor areas and facilities are nearby which makes transportation easier and makes the mechanics of education in and for the outdoors relatively simple. In-service education of teachers is needed; pilot and experimental programs should be initiated; instructional materials are necessary. ERIC can and should be a resource for leadership, for experimentation and research ideas and assistance, for information retrieval and dissemination, and for instructional materials. Working with and through school leaders, state departments of education, colleges and universities, and other resource agencies, ERIC can and should be a catalyst—a cutting edge for new and exciting ventures in education.

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